



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

**EDUCATION**

## **DC Tuition Assistance Grant 2021 Annual Performance Report**

### **Introduction**

The District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG) is a federally funded program that provides DC residents with up to \$10,000 per year toward the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition at public colleges and universities nationwide. The program also provides up to \$2,500 toward tuition at private nonprofit colleges and universities in the Washington, DC area and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) nationwide. The DCTAG program is operated by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).

A 2018 audit by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended that the DCTAG program release an annual report using a performance management framework that relates program performance to DCTAG's established program goal and objectives, in addition to the Annual Data Report that provides descriptive statistics about the students served. As such, DCTAG created the Annual Performance report in 2018 to outline DCTAG's goal and objectives and provide baseline metrics tied to these objectives. The 2021 report provides 2019, 2020 and 2021 performance metrics and represents the most recent phase of DCTAG over the program's 20-year history. This report should be viewed in conjunction with the newly expanded DCTAG Annual Data Report, available [here](#).

### **Goal and Objectives**

As established by DCTAG's authorizing legislation, the goal of DCTAG is to be a program that "enables college-bound residents of the District of Columbia to have greater choices among institutions of higher education." To achieve this goal, DCTAG has four key objectives:

1. Conduct outreach to expand awareness of DCTAG.
2. Assess and adjust program technology, policy, and procedures to enable DC residents to apply to the program with minimal burden.
3. Maintain and strengthen responsible stewardship of financial resources through a payment process with sufficient checks and balances.
4. Support student college-going, persistence, and completion.

Acknowledging that the program has changed over time, in early 2021, the program staff reviewed and revised the program goals<sup>1</sup> to build upon progress made over the past three

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<sup>1</sup> These objectives were modified slightly in 2021. Prior reports are a useful resource for the previous objective wording. These objectives build upon those established in 2018, and as such, relevant historical metrics will be aligned with the appropriate new objectives where possible.

years. These revised goals for 2021 onward are detailed in the last section of this report. Unless otherwise noted, performance data and targets reflect the calendar year (January – December).

### **Objective 1: Conduct outreach to expand awareness of DCTAG**

Each year, DCTAG staff conduct extensive outreach to students and families to meet this objective. Efforts to build awareness are grouped into two key categories: communications and direct outreach. Direct outreach includes presentations, tables at college fairs, workshops, interviews, and virtual outreach sessions. DCTAG events were held in all eight wards of DC.

#### *Communications:*

In 2021, DCTAG renewed the contract with Campbell and Company DC to run a media campaign that continued to focus on social media and added print and other materials that were used in the past. The campaign leveraged the mayor’s back-to-school and reopening media outreach between April and August 2021. The campaign in 2021 started with social media, then added print and text messaging (100 individuals opted into the texting campaign). Next, bus shelters ads were placed strategically across the city during the summer (including DC’s three Wal-Mart locations, the Target in Columbia Heights, and near grocery stores and other retailers). Prior to the deadline, the vendor added geotargeting to deliver content to residents in high-traffic areas. Geotargeting delivers content to individuals based on their location.

Other methods of outreach included conducting social media outreach with high school students on OSSE’s Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram platforms, and conducting email outreach. DCTAG staff continued to email prior year applicants reminding them to reapply each award year and emailed 2020-21 school year seniors about starting DCTAG.

In the 2021 campaign, there were:

- Outdoor advertising (including bus stops, rather than Metrorail)
  - 10,181,500 total impressions
- Digital Advertising on Facebook and Instagram
  - 705,665 total impressions
  - 1,903 click-throughs to the DCTAG OneApp site
- Geotargeting
  - 375,000 total impressions
  - 1,032 click-throughs
- One streaming outlet reported
  - 366,647 total media impressions
  - 72 clicks on the adds over seven months (Feb. 1, 2021-Sept. 14, 2021).

*Outreach:*

In addition to media outreach, the DCTAG team conducts trainings with high school counselors, college financial aid offices and other stakeholders that support student college acceptance, enrollment, and persistence. This year, trainings were held for counselors affiliated with local education agencies (LEAs), nonprofits, College Board, and disability services.

Table 1 provides information on metrics related to Objective 1 between January and December for the year indicated.

*Table 1: 2019-2021 Performance for Objective 1*

<b>Metric</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
General outreach sessions	68	70	33
Students/parents reached at general outreach sessions	6,497	4,174	1,448
Spring Blitz events (public and public charter schools)*	28	0	0
Students assisted at Spring Blitz events*	406	0	0
Trainings for college counselors and support staff (represents a sub-set of the outreach sessions)	N/A	6	6
TAG Talk newsletter/notifications issues sent to students, guardians, and parents	3	3	3

\* The Spring Blitz event was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency. Students uploaded their documentation online rather than submitting it in-person.

**Objective 2: Assess and adjust program technology, policy, and procedures to enable DC residents to apply to the program with minimum burden**

This objective speaks to ensuring the application process is straightforward for students and families, since complicated applications can discourage students from applying for financial aid. In 2021, OSSE continued to build on improvements to the DC OneApp, which launched in 2016.

The 2021-22 award year application continued to allow students, parents, and guardians to upload documents into the online application. Staff continue to improve the payment and college transfer section of the application and made up to 20 enhancements to the application. DCTAG staff aim to increase the overall number of applicants, as well as the number and percentage of applicants deemed eligible, while limiting the number of incomplete applications. In the 2021-22 award year, DCTAG again reported a decline in the number of submitted and eligible applicants and saw the percentage of applicants deemed eligible decrease. The number of incomplete applications increased from last year, but also included ineligible individuals.

*COVID-19 Response:*

The DCTAG team continuously monitored and adjusted the application process throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency to meet the changing post-secondary landscape. In late 2020, OSSE announced a new application deadline of Friday, Sept. 17, 2021, for the 2021-22 award year. This followed the extension of the application deadline three times in 2020 to allow families additional time to make informed postsecondary choices as colleges and universities revised their plans for the 2020-21 academic year. [Note: This has been updated to Friday, Aug. 19, 2022, at 3 p.m. EDT for the 2022-23 application and each subsequent year until further notice].

Table 2 provides information on metrics related to Objective 2. An overall metric for this objective is that DCTAG applicants live in all eight wards, and this remains true. In this table, 2019 indicates 2019-20 award year application cycle, 2020 indicates the 2020-21 cycle, 2021 indicates 2021-22 cycle.

*Table 2: 2019-2021 Performance for Objective 2*

<b>Metric</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Applications submitted	6,367	5,610	5,530
Applicants deemed eligible <sup>2</sup>	5,033	4,515	4,312
Applicants deemed eligible (percent of applications submitted)	79%	80%	78%
Incomplete applications	1,334	1,002	1,148

**Objective 3: Maintain and strengthen responsible stewardship of financial resources through a payment process with sufficient checks and balances**

*Fraud Prevention and Monitoring*

The DCTAG Office worked extensively with the DC Office of the Attorney General and OSSE’s Residency Audit Unit to conduct investigations in cases where DC domicile was in question. The DCTAG staff also conducted reviews of DC government data systems and that of other states as well to aid in a detailed review of questionable cases. When necessary, the US Department of Education’s Office of the Inspector General was also contacted if fraudulent data was reflected on the FAFSA Student Aid Report.

*Financial Efficiency*

The DCTAG team has separated the roles of application approval and disbursement to institutions of higher education (IHEs) in an effort to add an additional check and balance to the disbursement process.

Table 3 provides information on metrics related to Objective 3. Because students receive their award in the year following their application on this table the performance in 2019 reflects the

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<sup>2</sup> Includes applicants with a status of “Eligible” or “Eligible – Ineligible Institution”.

2018-19 academic year, and the performance in 2020 reflects the 2019-20 academic year, and the performance in 2021 reflects the 2020-21 academic year.

*Table 3: 2019-2021 Performance for Objective 3*

<b>Metric</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Total funds disbursed	\$31,402,075	\$30,972,164	\$29,168,348
DCTAG/Accounting reconciliation meetings	12	12	12
Students receiving DCTAG awards	4,315	4,274	3,865

Note: Funds disbursed is a point-in-time metric and may be updated if requested at a later date.

#### **Objective 4: Support student college-going, persistence, and completion**

The DCTAG program works with both internal and external stakeholders to help students make informed college choices. If a student selects an institution that is a good fit, they are more likely to persist and complete college. DCTAG supports these choices both before students begin college and during students' college careers. Since DCTAG staff do not necessarily have pre-existing relationships with students and therefore do not know the full breadth of students' academic experience, DCTAG has focused on using professional development to help train those who are advising students throughout their college decision-making process including high school counselors, college access program staff and financial aid staff at IHEs.

In 2021, DCTAG supported three events offered by Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking (DISB) and the Student Loan Ombudsman for DC in May, July, and August. In 2021, Director Kenneth McGhee authored and shared three articles locally and through the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and National Association for College Admission Counseling.

DCTAG continued to offer the Transfer Portal in the DC OneApp, so that students transferring mid-year (or those who attend a different university than the one listed in the DCTAG application) may update the institution in the DC OneApp system.

Recognizing the changing landscape of postsecondary education both at the individual and institutional level, in 2021, DCTAG surveyed past and current recipients to learn about the impact of COVID-19 on their postsecondary education plans. An overwhelming number of respondents indicated COVID-19 had negative effects on their college plans and the most frequently cited impacts related to the:

- inferiority of online courses,
- need for more financial support,
- changes to employment, and
- issues with class availability or course loads.

These issues included references to fewer courses being offered, increased costs to attend, reduced access to financial aid (specifically work study) and difficulty navigating college systems without being in person.

There was a general sense of students being overwhelmed or taken off course from their intended path due to events outside their control. To address these issues the following policy considerations were identified to guide work in 2022:

- Maximum Award Years – Too much flexibility may hurt student completion rates
  - Consider: One year of additional eligibility for students with fewer than 30 credits to receive their degree, if they experienced hardship related to the pandemic, and only if maximum lifetime award amount is not yet reached.
- Continue advocating for congressional increase to maximum year/lifetime award amounts.
- Outreach and awareness campaign around summer funding for students who have not received the maximum award.
- Outreach to students who have stopped out of their college enrollment (based on the survey, an overwhelming majority of these individuals expressed that they plan to complete college).